

PLUS: JOEL ACHENBACH ON THE MEANING OF SEPTEMBER 11;
A LAST LOOK AT HERBLOCK'S LAIR

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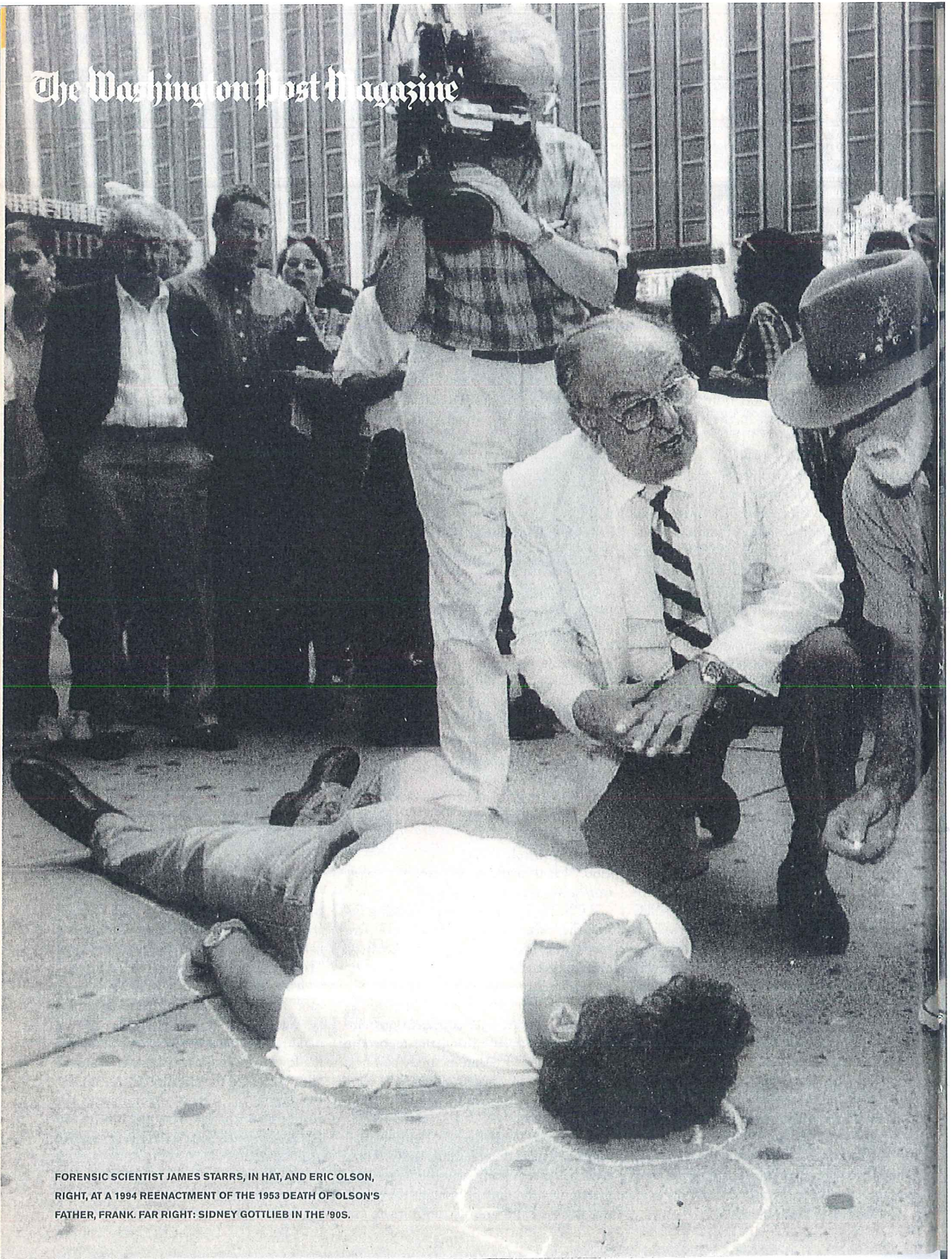
**FRANK OLSON DIED
MYSTERIOUSLY AFTER
BEING SLIPPED LSD.**

Bad Chemistry

*The haunting legacy of a CIA scientist and his unwitting victims—
where patriotism and madness meet* **BY TED GUP**



The Washington Post Magazine

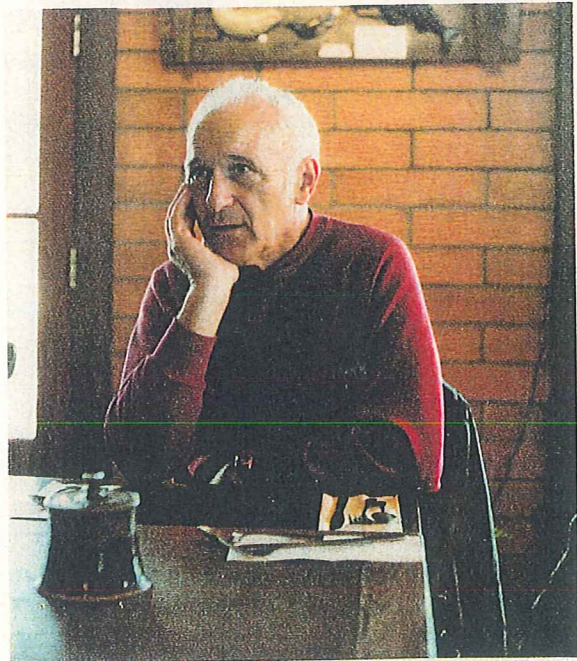


FORENSIC SCIENTIST JAMES STARRS, IN HAT, AND ERIC OLSON, RIGHT, AT A 1994 REENACTMENT OF THE 1953 DEATH OF OLSON'S FATHER, FRANK. FAR RIGHT: SIDNEY GOTTLIEB IN THE '90S.



REENACTMENT PHOTOGRAPH BY HELAYNE SEIDMAN; GOTTLIEB COURTESY STANLEY MEHR; TUMBLER BY JULIA EWAN

THE COLDEST WARRIOR



Sid Gottlieb experimented with brainwashing, injected toothpaste with toxins, dosed unsuspecting Americans with LSD—all in the name of defending the free world. Which raises an uncomfortably relevant question: When is it acceptable to fight evil with evil? BY TED GUP



We cannot afford methods less ruthless than those of our opposition.
— John Le Carre, *The Spy Who Came In From the Cold*

On a sunny afternoon in 1984, a 66-year-old retired CIA chemist named Sidney Gottlieb prepared for a most unusual visitor. Three decades earlier he had promised a widow named Alice Olson that if ever she wished to see him she need only pick up the phone.

Now, out of the blue, she had called to redeem the pledge, asking if she and her two sons could come to his remote retreat in Rappahannock County, Va. What she wanted was answers—answers to what really happened to her husband.

The fate of Frank Olson, long stamped “Top Secret,” was a dark and cautionary tale of the Cold War. On November 19, 1953, Olson, a 43-year-old scientist at Fort Detrick, had joined other government researchers at Deep Creek Lodge in Western Maryland. There, an unseen hand had slipped 70 micrograms of LSD into his glass of Cointreau and the glasses of others. The meeting soon degenerated into hours of drug-induced hilarity. But days after, Olson was said to be sullen and withdrawn. A government official had escorted him to New York to “take care of him”—words his son Eric would later use with grim irony. Shortly after 2:30 on the morning of November 28, 1953, Olson’s body was discovered, bloodied and broken, on the pavement of Manhattan’s Seventh Avenue, clothed only in underpants and a T-shirt.

The government asked the family to believe that he had hurled himself through a closed window on the 10th floor of the Statler Hotel, while a government scientist assigned to keep an eye on him had slept in the next bed.

Soon after Olson’s death, Gottlieb, posing as a Pentagon employee, paid his respects to Alice Olson at her home in Frederick. He said if ever there was anything he could do, just give him a call.

That visit unnerved her. Her coffee cup rattled in her hand. Twenty-two years later, on June 11, 1975, she inadvertently dis-

covered from a Washington Post article describing her husband’s death—without naming him—that Frank Olson had been an unwitting guinea pig in an experiment in mind control conducted by the CIA. Olson’s sons, Eric and Nils, would reach an even darker conclusion—that what happened to their father was no accident. Only the man who headed the CIA’s LSD program knew the whole story. That was Sidney Gottlieb.

That sunny Virginia day in 1984, Gottlieb was anxious about the impending visit. So were the Olsons. From the headlines, Gottlieb had emerged as a kind of Dr. Strangelove. He had overseen a vast network of psychological and medical experiments conducted in hospitals, universities, research labs, prisons and safe houses, many of them carried out on unsuspecting subjects—mental patients, prostitutes and their johns, drug addicts, and anyone else who stumbled into the CIA’s web. Some had been subjected to electroshock therapy in an effort to alter their behavior. Some endured prolonged sensory deprivation.

Some were doped and made to sleep for weeks in an attempt to induce an amnesia-like state. Others suffered a relentless loop of audiotape playing the same message hundreds of thousands of times.

As the CIA’s sorcerer, Gottlieb had also attempted to raise assassination to an art form. Out of his labs had come a poisoned handkerchief designed to do in a Libyan colonel, a bacteriological agent for a Congolese leader and debilitating poisons intended for Cuba’s Fidel Castro. (None of these toxins are known to have found their mark.) Hounded by reporters, congressional investigators and his victims, Gottlieb had virtually vanished from Washington in the mid-1970s. And now, there was a knock at his door.

“Oh my God,” Gottlieb muttered, greeting the Olsons. “I’m so relieved to see you all don’t have a gun.”

The night before, he explained, he dreamed that the family had arrived carrying weapons and shot him dead. The Olsons assured him that was not their intent. Only later did it occur to Eric Olson, who has a PhD in psychology from Harvard, that in relating his dream, Gottlieb had deftly turned the tables on the family, disarming them and putting them in a position in which they were reassuring the very man they held responsible for Frank Olson’s death. Says Eric Olson, “He was not the master of mind control for nothing.”

SEVENTEEN YEARS LATER, I too found myself on the twisting roads of Rappahannock County, searching for answers of my own. It was less the mystery of Frank Olson’s death that drew me here than the enigma of Sidney Gottlieb’s life. In the course of researching a book about the CIA, I had become intrigued with him. I wondered what had possessed him to do what he had done, and what had become of him in the quarter-century since he had left Washington.

The name Sidney Gottlieb is but an obscure footnote in the nation’s history. Yet for a generation of Americans who came of



THE GOVERNMENT ASKED FRANK OLSON’S FAMILY TO BELIEVE THAT HE HAD HURLED HIMSELF THROUGH A CLOSED WINDOW ON THE 10TH FLOOR OF A HOTEL.

Ted Gup is the author of *The Book of Honor: The Secret Lives and Deaths of CIA Operatives* and is a professor of journalism at Case Western Reserve University. He will be fielding questions and comments about this article at 1 p.m. Monday on www.washingtonpost.com/liveonline.



age in the Cold War, his experiments came to define the CIA as a rogue agency. His nefarious programs remain a reference point for government gone awry and, to this day, shape public perceptions of the CIA both here and abroad. They have been encrypted into the cultural memory of those who have never even heard his name. And, now, as America once again mobilizes to fight a formidable foe, they stand as a grim reminder that in the desire to protect the homeland, zeal can mutate into evil.

Gottlieb himself was condemned to serve as a kind of poster child of Cold War excesses and demonized in the press as a clubfooted scientist who stuttered and thirsted after fresh goat's milk. Some, like Eric Olson, liken him to Nazi researchers whose experiments perverted science and defied conscience. His notoriety earned him a place in Norman Mailer's novel *Harlot's Ghost* and Barbara Kingsolver's *The Poisonwood Bible*.

I arrived in Rappahannock County two years too late to speak with Gottlieb. He died on March 6, 1999, at the University of Virginia hospital in Charlottesville after a long bout with a bad heart. Still, the answers I sought were not ones that Gottlieb would likely have offered even in life. In some ways my task was eased by the passage of time. What was left to me was the detritus of any life—dusty documents, memories of friends and foes, a scat-



GOTTLIEB WAS PRESENT WHEN OLSON SIPPED HIS LSD-LACED DRINK—BUT NOBODY HAS EVER PROVED THAT HIS HAND MIXED THE DRUG WITH THE DRINK.

TOP: GOTTLIEB AND LAWYER TERRY LENZNER IN 1977. FRANK OLSON, ABOVE, WITH HIS WIFE, ALICE, IN 1952; OPPOSITE, IN 1942.

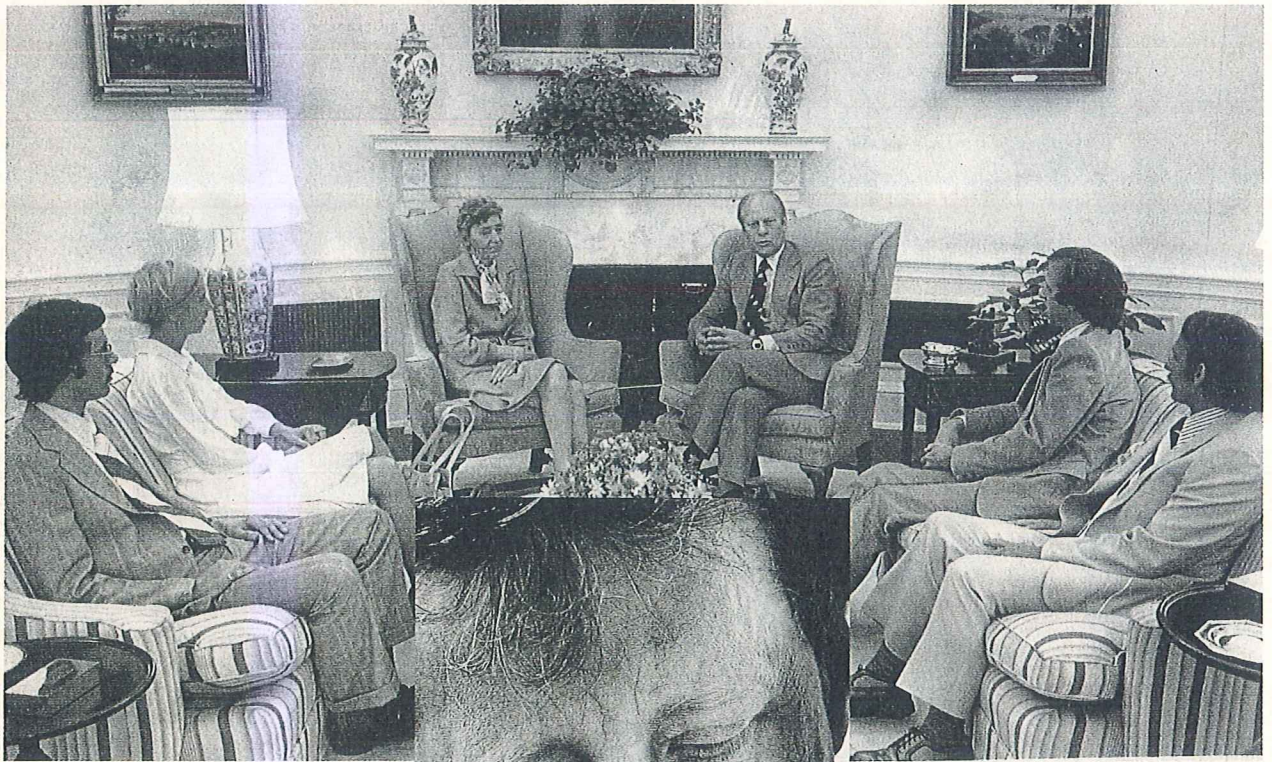
ings and goings easier. This was archaeology, sifting through the artifacts of another man's life.

Who was Sid Gottlieb? Early on I discovered that someone else had already spent a lifetime asking that very question. That was Gottlieb himself.

tering of photos and letters, the odd inscription found in a book. His family, battered by adverse press, declined to meet with me.

"You never get it right," said his widow, Margaret. "You never can know what he was. I would just as soon it was never talked about again." Who could blame her? Their four children—two sons and two daughters—grew up with a father stalked by his own past.

I began my quest in Washington, Va., population 192. "Little Washington," it's affectionately called to set it apart from the more querulous Washington an hour east. It is an idyllic landscape of hills and meadows and clear brooks. People here dote on history, but not one another's past. For Gottlieb, it was less Elba than Brigadoon. I stayed in an inn a pasture away from the modest brick bungalow on Mount Salem Avenue where Gottlieb passed his final year. I walked across the damp field to his back yard, the air heavy with honeysuckle. A sundial lay on the ground beside an herb garden. A tiny Oriental warrior stood watch. A wooden ramp was put in to make Gottlieb's final com-



HE WAS BORN August 3, 1918, in New York City, to Louis and Fanny Gottlieb, Hungarian immigrants and Orthodox Jews. Gottlieb was born with two clubfeet. A cousin, Sylvia Gowell, recalls that when the blanket covering his feet was first removed, his mother screamed. For years he was unable to walk and was carried everywhere by his mother. Three times he underwent surgery. Like his father, Louis, and brother David, Sidney stuttered. Gottlieb studied Hebrew, was bar mitzvahed, and distinguished himself as a student. His father ran a sweatshop, and later worked as a tailor. His father's struggles doubtless helped mold his son's socialist vision of the world.

At the University of Wisconsin, Gottlieb and roommate Stanley Mehr were active in the Young People's Socialist League. In 1940, he graduated magna cum laude with a degree in agriculture. His senior thesis: "Studies on Ascorbic Acid in Cowpeas, *Vigna Sinensis*." Three years later, Gottlieb earned a doctoral degree in chemistry from the California Institute of Technology. There he met his wife, Margaret Moore, the daughter of a Presbyterian missionary.

The couple moved to Washington, where Gottlieb went to work for the Department of Agriculture. In the summer of 1944, while Mehr was in Europe in the Army, he received a letter from Gottlieb boasting that his wife had produced eight ounces of milk for their baby. Mehr wondered how Gottlieb



'YOU FELT LIKE YOU WERE PLAYING CAT-AND-MOUSE AND HE WAS WAY AHEAD OF YOU,' ERIC OLSON SAYS OF GOTTLIEB. 'HE HAD A WAY OF DECENTERING YOU.'

TOP: PRESIDENT GERALD FORD WITH THE OLSON FAMILY AT THE WHITE HOUSE IN 1975. ABOVE: ERIC OLSON IN 1994.

had measured the output of milk. He put the question to him in a letter. Replied Gottlieb, he simply weighed the infant before and after nursing. Vintage Gottlieb, ever the scientist.

In 1951, after jobs with the Department of Agriculture, the Food and Drug Administration and the University of Maryland, Gottlieb joined the CIA. John Gittinger conducted the agency's initial assessment of Gottlieb and recalls, "He always had a certain amount of 'guilt'—if you want to use that word—about not being able to be in the service during World War II like all his contemporaries because of his clubfoot, so he gave an unusual amount of patriotic service to make up for that."

Mehr remembers the day Gottlieb told him he had joined the CIA. "I was shocked," recalls Mehr. "How in the hell would they accept someone who was a socialist?" he asked Gottlieb. "Do they know you are a member of the Young People's Socialist League?"

That, said Gottlieb, was the first thing he told the agency. CIA Director Allen Dulles "was astute enough to know that no one hated Communists

more than socialists," observes Mehr.

At the time Gottlieb joined the agency, he and his wife owned 14 acres on Beulah Road near Vienna, Va. They lived in a log cabin that had neither running water nor an indoor toilet. Gottlieb rigged up an outdoor shower, using a 50-gallon metal

drum filled with icy cold water from a well. Over time, Gottlieb modernized the house. The family sold Christmas trees and goat's milk.

Given his background, Gottlieb was assigned to the CIA's chemical group. He secretly worked out of a brick building catty-corner to the Department of Agriculture on 14th Street. It was years before Mehr, an Agriculture employee, discovered that his friend worked across the street.

Gottlieb was held in high esteem at the agency. "Sid kept us from doing crazy things when some of our case officers had crazy ideas," recalls Sam Halpern, former executive assistant to the head of clandestine operations. One scheme Gottlieb is said to have helped nix was a 1960 plan to expose Castro to an aerosol spray of LSD. Gottlieb argued that LSD was too unpredictable, that Castro might take some action inimical to the United States. "Very resourceful, very intelligent and completely loyal to the activity we were in," says James Drum, Gottlieb's former boss.

The origins of Gottlieb's research into drugs and mind control date back to the Korean War. American POWs appeared inexplicably compliant in the hands of the enemy. Amid Cold War hysteria, reports circulated of POWs being doped and "brainwashed." Intelligence reports suggested the Communists were sinister puppet-masters holding sway over innocent Americans—the "Manchurian Candidate" syndrome.

"The impetus for going into the LSD project," Gottlieb would later acknowledge, "specifically rested in a report, never verified, I must say, but it was there, that the Russians had bought the world supply" of LSD. What kind of threat was this?

"Somebody had to bell the cat and find out," says Halpern. "That's how we all looked at it. We were all stumbling in the dark." So the CIA launched its own research. The most notorious project was MK-ULTRA, created in 1953. It was, in Gottlieb's words, intended to explore "various techniques of behavior control in intelligence operations." It funded an array of research, including electric-shock treatments, hypnosis and experiments designed to program or deprogram a subject's memory. Sometimes research bordered on the ludicrous. A top magician was retained to help the agency practice sleight of hand, in part so that researchers could slip LSD to the unsuspecting. Another trick: swizzle sticks impregnated with the hallucinogen.

Gottlieb had primary say over the direction and funding of the program. It was Gottlieb who decided to give doses to the unwitting. He even approached agency colleagues asking for permission to dose them without notice. Many, including Halpern, declined. In most instances it was not Gottlieb, but rather a network of researchers on contract to the CIA who actually administered the

drugs. Gottlieb would later claim that he could not personally be held accountable for any abuses, that he trusted in the professionalism of the researchers.

By distancing himself from the specifics, he had hoped to immunize himself and the agency. Gottlieb justified giving psychedelics to the unwitting on the grounds that to do otherwise would skew the results. If the subject did not know what was happening, he might well imagine that he was losing his mind and unravel. That might undermine his capacity to resist interrogation.

Gottlieb himself told friends that he personally took LSD more than 200 times. He would lock himself in his office and record his every sensation. It was not always clear where he drew the line between research and recreational drug use. He once described how LSD affected him: "I happened to experience an out-of-bodyness, a feeling as though I am in a kind of transparent sausage skin that covers my whole body and it is shimmering, and I have a sense of well-being and euphoria for most of the next hour or two hours, and then it gradually subsides."



HE CONCLUDED THAT THE INJURY COULD ONLY HAVE OCCURRED BEFORE OLSON'S FATAL PLUNGE, SUPPORTING SUSPICIONS THAT HE HAD LIKELY BEEN MURDERED.

AT ERIC OLSON'S REQUEST, INVESTIGATOR STARRS HAD FRANK OLSON'S BODY EXHUMED IN FREDERICK IN 1994.

from East Germany. For months the CIA had debriefed the chemist in a safe house. He claimed that he had provided technical support to Communist intelligence services, but CIA headquarters was not convinced that he was who he said he was. So

GOTTLIEB WAS PRESENT that night at Deep Creek Lodge when Olson, unsuspecting, sipped his LSD-laced Cointreau—but nobody has ever proved that Gottlieb's own hand mixed the drug with the drink.

Yet there is little doubt that he had approved the experiment.

"He was a wild man," remembers covert operative Eloise Randolph Page, once chief of the CIA's scientific operations branch. Page remembers John Schwab, the scientific director at Fort Detrick and Olson's superior, telling her he blamed Gottlieb for Olson's death. Shortly afterward, Schwab told her, "As long as I am head of Fort Detrick, Sid Gottlieb will never be allowed inside the gates."

But despite a formal reprimand, Gottlieb's career continued to evolve. Early in 1957 Gottlieb temporarily moved from technical support to espionage. "I propositioned him," recalls William Hood, a veteran operative. "I said, 'You don't understand much of what goes on in the boonies where the work is being done. If I get a job overseas, why don't you come along and look at it from the inside out?'"

Gottlieb liked the idea. For months he studied the tradecraft of spying. In September 1957, he and his family moved to Munich. For two years, he worked under cover, running foreign agents. One CIA officer recalls his help in the case of a chemist who had escaped

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Ask Tom

Loud music and ringing cell phones aren't the only forms of restaurant noise pollution. Take the experience of Arlingtonian Lisa Bilder and her friends, who were enjoying the last few minutes of dinner at a packed New Heights in Woodley Park until, she writes, they overheard somebody "we thought was the manager screaming at someone on the staff, 'You are [expletive] fired.'" Bilder, "embarrassed in front of my out of town visitor," quickly arranged to pay the bill and leave, but, she says, "our evening was ruined." A spokeswoman for the restaurant confirms that the manager in question had "a dramatic moment" during that unexpectedly busy night, but that explanation won't win any repeat business from Bilder. All of which should remind restaurant workers: Most guests are paying to unwind when they go out, not to sit in on primal scream therapy.

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instance, is a delicious deal. Aside from some Mediterranean colors that brighten the interior and a bottle of olive oil on each table, however, there's not much of a Spanish pulse. Take away the menu and the music and it could be your neighborhood watering hole.

The same goes for the cooking: Much of it is pretty standard pub grub prepared with a Spanish accent. But every so often you find a dish that takes off. The first one I encountered was the fritters of goat cheese and crushed almonds. Like everything that preceded it, the dish came out quickly (maybe too quickly, as if it had been preassembled and ready to go). But the piping-hot morsels, with their nubby crusts, tangy molten centers and racy onion sauce, proved delicious. So, too, did a rectangle of salmon, lightly seared and lapped with apple cider sauce and snips of serrano ham.

When faced with a choice between surf and turf, head for the sea. Mussels are pleasantly spiced with crushed red pepper and garlic, and clams steamed in beer with cilantro and tomato make for a teasing little repast. The diced pork kebab gets a nice kick from lemon, but other meat dishes fall flat. When I ordered sliced beef wrapped around "pickled vegetables" and served on a blue cheese sauce, I wasn't picturing the reality: Inside the meat was an ordinary green pickle.

Other tapas miss the mark, too. Fried calamari is limp, and served with an oddly sweet aioli. Grilled chorizo on garlic mashed potatoes is more Minneapolis than Madrid; the scored sausage is surprisingly timid, the potatoes are shy of any seasoning. The vegetable p ate, layered in three colors (broccoli-

green, cauliflower-white, carrot-orange), is pretty to look at, but too thick and doughy.

The waiters don't promote the entrees much. There are only six or so, including specials, and some of them are basically grown-up versions of the appetizers. One of the big plates is pan-roasted chicken, which is supposedly served with "a savory chocolate sauce" that wasn't in evidence when I tried it. Sprinkled with sesame seeds, the chicken rests on a scoop of mashed potatoes sprouting a big rosemary sprig, surrounded

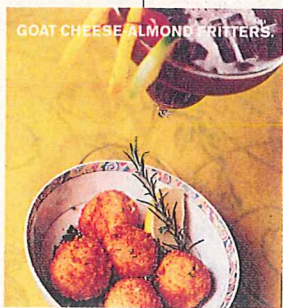
by a bushel of soft-cooked carrots and pearl onions. It tastes like a homey Sunday supper.

The sleeper among the main courses is the paella, priced at \$29.95 but plenty for four to share. It takes a bit longer than the rest of the menu to make an appearance ("We're making it from scratch," a server

explained on one of my visits), but your patience is rewarded with a big, beautiful, saffron-tinted mound of rice served in a wide copper pan. Black-shelled mussels and wedges of lemon alternate around the edges, and the dish is meaty with bites of chicken, shrimp and clams, and colorful with peas and chopped red bell peppers. Even so, the olive oil-enriched Spanish rice remains the star attraction.

Desserts, including a brownie with chocolate sauce and an orange-flavored cheesecake that tastes like a room-temperature Creamsicle, speak with a decidedly American accent. The most satisfying ending is the most simple: Who's to argue with a soft, soothing flan? □

To chat with Tom Sietsema online, click on Live Online at www.washingtonpost.com, Wednesdays at 11 a.m.



GOTTLIEB

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Gottlieb was asked to interrogate him. Within a single session, the officer recalls, Gottlieb established that the chemist was telling the truth, and, in so doing, exposed a system of "secret writing" then in use by "the other side."

As chief of base in Munich, Hood was both Gottlieb's superior and his friend. But Hood and Gottlieb had differences when it came to the subject of drugs. "Sid and I had a long debate about the use of drugs in interrogations," recalls Hood. "He thought that—I hope I'm not slandering the poor bastard—that it would be possible with the right drug . . . I don't know what part of the brain screens indiscretions, but that it could be suspended somehow, and that under some euphoria a person might be responsive to whatever questions were asked."

At the time, Hood's objections were more technical than moral: "My view was that 'seeing was believing.' He wasn't going to move me unless he came up with a wonder drug of some kind, and I wasn't going to stop him from continuing his research."

When the full extent of Gottlieb's drug research came to light decades later, Hood was stunned. "I do think he was entirely out of line with some of the stuff they were doing," says Hood. Still, he defends his friend. "It's the kind of thing I don't think anyone could understand unless they had been involved in it," he says. "Intelligence services should not be confused with the Boy Scouts."

Ultimately, however, even Gottlieb gave up on LSD. In 1961 or 1962, in what came to be known as the "Gottlieb Report," he concluded that as "an intelligence tool—it was inherently not effective." Beyond that, he noted, "there was a large disinclination on the part of the American intelligence officers to use it—they found it distasteful and strange. They had moral objections."

IN THE FALL OF 1960, Gottlieb was secretly dispatched to Leopoldville, the Congo. On September 19, 1960, a message went out from CIA headquarters classified "Eyes Only." It was to Lawrence Devlin, the CIA's station chief, advising him that he would be receiving a visitor—"Joe from Paris." Days later, Gottlieb intercepted Devlin near the U.S. Embassy. Devlin recognized him at once. Gottlieb was familiar to Devlin and other operatives who had come to rely upon him for the exotica of

spycraft—recording devices, hidden cameras, bugs, invisible ink, whatever was needed for a “tech op.” Gottlieb was to Devlin what “Q” was to James Bond.

The two got into Devlin’s Peugeot 403 and drove to a safe house. Devlin turned up the volume on a radio while Gottlieb delivered his instructions. What Gottlieb said left Devlin dumbfounded: Devlin was to assassinate Patrice Lumumba, a charismatic leftist leader. “Jesus Christ!” Devlin thought. He had long worried about Soviet efforts to gain a foothold in the Congo and had lobbied to get rid of Lumumba. But this was not what he had in mind.

Gottlieb carefully withdrew a small kit containing a deadly toxin—whether it was anthrax, tuberculosis or tularemia, Gottlieb could not later recall. It was concealed within a tube of toothpaste. Gottlieb also set out a hypodermic syringe—in case the toothpaste scheme failed—as well as rubber gloves and a gauze mask. “And just who authorized such a mission?” Devlin asked. “The president,” said Gottlieb. “And how do you know that?” pressed Devlin. “Richard Bissell,” answered Gottlieb, naming the head of covert operations.

Devlin now says Gottlieb showed no reluctance. But Devlin says he had no intention of carrying out the assignment. Late one night, soon after Gottlieb returned to Washington, Devlin tossed the bacteriological agent into the Congo River, where it was carried over the cataracts and disappeared. Four months later, Lumumba was killed, apparently by a rival faction.

Devlin never blamed Gottlieb for the unsavory assignment. “I thought he [Gottlieb] got a bum rap for things his seniors knew were done,” he says. “He was acting under instructions from his superiors.” Then he pauses. “But, as we both know, as indicated by the boys who got hung at Nuremberg, that is no excuse.”

Gottlieb would later be held answerable before public tribunals, but the private trials were most painful. His daughter Rachel married Joel Samoff, a noted scholar of African affairs. Samoff feared that Gottlieb’s notoriety in Africa would impede his own scholarship and make him a pariah on that continent. That animosity, say Mehr and other Gottlieb friends, strained Gottlieb’s relationship with Rachel.

“I am not interested in talking about my dad,” says Rachel. “I don’t want to be connected with that history.”

IN 1966 GOTTLIEB was named CIA chief of the technical services division. His oversight was far-ranging. He supervised some of those who secretly opened Americans’ mail. He saw to it that a psychological profile of the skipper of the *Pueblo*, the intelligence vessel captured by North Korea in 1968, was prepared for the president. His staff briefed the president’s medical personnel, prior to overseas trips, on the perils of an LSD attack.

In 1973, after two decades in the CIA, 55-year-old Gottlieb retired from the agency. Prior to retirement he had been awarded the Distinguished Intelligence Medal, one of the CIA’s highest honors. He and his wife sold their house in Vienna and most of their possessions. In May 1974, with two suitcases, they commenced a two-year worldwide trip across Asia and Africa. For months, Gottlieb volunteered in an Indian hospital. In July 1975 he and his wife began an overland bus tour of the Mideast. A month later, Gottlieb received a letter in Istanbul informing him of impending congressional investigations of CIA covert operations.

That was the beginning of a series of front-page exposés revealing a long list of CIA abuses. Americans were horrified. The war in Vietnam had just ended. It was the era of post-Watergate revelations, a time of revulsion and reform. It was also a time when the Olson family was offered some measure of relief. On July 21, 1975, President Gerald Ford personally apologized to the Olson family. Three days later, CIA Director William Colby handed the family previously classified documents. A year later Congress provided the Olsons a financial settlement of \$750,000.

Sid Gottlieb had not been forgotten. He would be needed to testify, the Istanbul letter informed him. Two days later Gottlieb returned to the United States. He soon accepted a grant of immunity to testify before a Senate committee. Unlike other witnesses, Gottlieb was allowed to testify in private sessions. He had a weak heart, it was argued, and could not stand the stress of public hearings.

Gottlieb did not allow himself any show of emotion, but inside he seethed. He bristled at the long-ago reprimand he had received from Dulles in the aftermath of the Olson episode. “You exercised poor judgment in this case,” Dulles had scolded. Gottlieb had reluctantly conceded that LSD may have triggered what he called “the suicide” but argued that “it is practically impossible for this drug to have any harmful effects.” Later he as-

serted, “Lots of people get depressed.”

But it was not the criticism that had stung most. In a 1983 deposition in a civil suit, Gottlieb would note: “I remember feeling: ‘Why don’t these people talk to me?’” In testimony before a Senate committee, he admitted that “the specter of the suicide had haunted me many, many times since November 1953.” He had considered quitting the CIA and taking up the study of psychiatry “to better understand the meaning of this tragic incident.”

But Olson’s death didn’t end CIA-funded experiments with LSD. Indeed, according to records made public in the mid-’70s, the funding and scope of that research expanded. Many of the details will likely never be known. Gottlieb had destroyed the MK-ULTRA files just before retiring. The records might be “misunderstood,” he had said.

Among family and friends, Gottlieb blamed the CIA for failing to protect him. In depositions, he revealed that he had urged the agency not to release his name. “I became aware after a while that the names of essentially everybody but myself were deleted, but mine was left in, and I asked my lawyer to object to that practice,” said Gottlieb. It did no good. Gottlieb felt he had been made a scapegoat.

Margaret Gottlieb viewed the press and Congress with a measure of contempt: Her husband, patriotic to a fault, had been treated no better than a war criminal. As the hearings pressed on, Gottlieb might well have reflected on the very different path taken by his brother David. Both were brilliant researchers with PhDs. Both investigated plants for their medicinal properties. Both were severe stutterers. But while Sidney had turned his talents to searching for deadly toxins and potent hallucinogens with which to do the CIA’s bidding, David had become co-discoverer of lifesaving antibiotics. Today, on the campus of the University of Illinois, where David Gottlieb was a professor, a bronze plaque celebrates his achievements.

Outwardly, Sidney Gottlieb appeared unfazed by events. “He certainly didn’t express it, but we don’t know what went on inside this guy,” recalls David Gottlieb’s widow, Amy Zahl Gottlieb. “Don’t forget he was used to keeping his feelings to himself, away from his family.” But there is little to suggest that Gottlieb was racked by guilt. He had done what the nation had asked of him. He wrote off the criticism as demagoguery and hypocrisy. Some of the schemes for which he and the agency were

blasted—for example, assassination scenarios against Castro euphemistically called “executive action” capabilities—originated in the Oval Office of President John F. Kennedy. A little more than a decade later, brother Ted, the senator, was grilling Gottlieb for those very actions.

“Sid was being crucified,” says Ken Fienup, a close friend. “He was doing things that at the time were considered necessary and proper by our government.” Fienup draws an analogy to his own career as an engineer who worked on dams, once widely viewed as of great social benefit and now seen by many as an affront to nature. It was as if history were a game of musical chairs, and Gottlieb had been caught standing when the music stopped.

Other friends share that view. “I don’t think Sid was particularly apologetic about things,” says Mehr. “I don’t see why he should have been. I mean this was the Cold War—W-A-R.”

But a congressional committee headed by Sen. Frank Church rejected such arguments. In the epilogue to its report, the committee concluded, “The United States must not adopt the tactics of the enemy. Means are as important as ends. Crises make it tempting to ignore the wise restraints that make men free. But each time we do so, each time the means we use are wrong, our inner strength, the strength which makes us free, is lessened.”

AFTER THE congressional hearings, Gottlieb and his wife moved to California to reassemble their lives. Gottlieb enrolled at San Jose State University and earned a master’s degree in education with a focus on speech pathology. In 1980, he moved back east, to Rappahannock County. No longer cast as the malevolent CIA scientist, Gottlieb was free to reinvent himself, to indulge his passions for farming and his socialist’s interest in communal living.

He shared that vision with his cousin Sylvia Gowell and her husband, Robert. Together they created a communal home, in which they might help one another through their final years. The Gottliebs and Gowells purchased 50 acres that they christened Blackwater Estate after the stream that snakes through the property. Gottlieb sought a life of simplicity and conservation. The home he designed was passive solar. There were chickens and goats to be tended, vegetables and fruits to be canned. The commune was nearly self-sufficient. The doors were made three feet wide for the day when one or more of the residents would be in wheel-

chairs. “My husband called it either a geriatric commune or a kibbutz,” recalls Gowell.

Actually, Blackwater Estate became a kind of spiritual retreat and the focal point of a growing community who found in Gottlieb a charismatic soul mate. In his home, Gottlieb set aside a corner of the living room for morning meditation. He knelt on pillows and lit candles and incense. Nowhere was there reference to the CIA. After meditation, he bicycled two miles down a bumpy country road to fetch the newspaper and mail. He bought a used car, insisting on cloth interior and manual transmission. He rarely shed his Birkenstock sandals. “He was like an old hippie,” says Butch Zindel, a friend who marveled at Gottlieb’s modest needs.

In 1980, Virginia granted Gottlieb a li-

MOST PEOPLE IN RAPPAHANNOCK COUNTY HAD NO IDEA GOTTLIEB HAD EVER WORKED FOR THE CIA. HIS VIRTUE WAS UNQUESTIONED, HIS COUNSEL SOUGHT AFTER, HIS COMPANY PRIZED.

cense to practice speech pathology. He set up a clinic and volunteered in a local preschool helping small children with speech impediments. He also helped the elderly. In 1995, a neighbor, William Young, had a disabling stroke that left him unable to speak. It was Sidney Gottlieb, then 77, who taught him to talk again. For many years, Gottlieb volunteered at the Hospice of the Rapidan, spending long hours with the dying, reading to them or just holding hands and listening. Sometimes Gottlieb would pay a patient’s overdue electric bill or confer with a lawyer to make sure that a will was in order. In one instance, a terminally ill man, long emotionally isolated from his wife and friends, finally opened up to Gottlieb, unburdening himself of traumas suffered as a soldier in World War II. The man’s wife listened at the door, hearing for the first time the demons that had haunted her husband. Kathy Clements, the director of the hospice, remembers Gottlieb as “calming, quiet, peaceful and humble.”

Gottlieb threw himself into community activities, serving on the zoning board and arts council. He took part in local theater. Each year he was the angel in the Christmas play. The first to appear on stage, he wore white robes and carried a wand with a star at the end.

The transformation was complete. It was as if Gottlieb had lost his former self, walking backward, sweeping his trail clean with a branch. In his first life, he had explored how to control the minds of others. In his second, he had gained sway over his own recollections, granting himself immunity and a fresh start.

In the 1983 deposition, he said he could not even remember whether he attended Frank Olson’s funeral. (His signature appears neatly penned on the scroll of mourners collected that day.) Most people in Rappahannock County had no idea Gottlieb had ever worked for the CIA. His virtue was unquestioned, his counsel sought after, his company prized.

But in adopting a life of selfless virtue and transparency he had traded one cover story for another. Just when it seemed he had entirely distanced himself from his past it showed up again on his doorstep.

FOR 31 YEARS the Olson family had sought answers to Frank Olson’s death. Now, on that sunny day in 1984, Sid Gottlieb stood before them. “There was a tautness to him,” recalls Eric Olson. “He was kind of hyper-alert and extremely intelligent. You could feel that right away. I was dealing with a world-class intelligence—and a world-class shrewdness. You felt like you were playing cat-and-mouse and he was way ahead of you. He had a way of decentering you . . . He had a charm that was extraordinary. You could almost fall in love with the guy.”

Gottlieb gave the Olsons his standard justification: that giving unwitting subjects LSD had been essential to understand what would happen if “the enemy” should dose captured American scientists. But why Olson? Because, said Gottlieb, the agency enjoyed a liaison relationship with the scientists at Fort Detrick that made them particularly convenient subjects.

To specific questions—the whens and whats—Gottlieb drew a blank. At times he suggested that he and the Olsons shared much in common. Eric Olson remembers, “He tried to create an identification between himself and my father, saying they were similar guys, both being children of first-generation immigrants.” Gottlieb’s wife, Margaret, spoke of her father being a missionary in India. Olson’s

widow was the daughter of a missionary in China. "There was a sense that we were meeting a colleague on the one hand and an enemy on the other," says Eric Olson.

"I felt kind of brainwashed by the guy," remembers Nils Olson. "I ended up having paternalistic feelings toward him. That's how flipped upside down we were . . . you end up feeling violated."

Gottlieb offered up a mix of candor and indignation. "If you don't believe me," he told the Olsons, "you might as well leave." When Eric hinted that his father's death was no accident, Gottlieb suggested he seek mental counseling. Later Eric reached his own bitter conclusion. "He was lying the whole time. Virtually everything he said was a lie."

What was most unsettling to the Olsons was the way Gottlieb distanced himself from his own actions. "The thrust of what he did in the whole session," says Eric Olson, "was to say that 'that guy Gottlieb back there did some things that I'm ashamed of, but I am not him. I moved on. I left the agency, I went to India, and I am teaching children with learning disabilities, and I am consciousness-raising. I am not that guy.'"

Ten years later, in 1994, Gottlieb received yet another nettlesome visitor—James Starrs, a law professor and forensic scientist from George Washington University, who was working with Eric Olson to unravel the mystery of Frank Olson's death. Starrs found Gottlieb charming but "on the brink of explosion" each time he was challenged. Starrs asked why, after Frank Olson became depressed, Gottlieb had taken him to Harold Abramson, an allergist and self-proclaimed expert on LSD who had been a beneficiary of CIA funding (he once studied the effect of LSD on goldfish). With Frank Olson in turmoil, Abramson had given him a bottle of bourbon and Nembutal for insomnia.

The conclusion many drew based on this odd choice of therapists was that Gottlieb was more concerned with CIA secrecy than Olson's health. It was a point Gottlieb always hotly disputed. "I was very upset that a human being had been killed," he had once testified. "I didn't mean for that to happen. It was a total accident."

But James Starrs was not so sure. At the request of Eric Olson, Starrs had exhumed Frank Olson's body. What he says he found was evidence of a hematoma on the temple, an injury Starrs believed was too small to have been caused by the impact

with the pavement. His conclusion was that the injury could only have occurred before Olson's fatal plunge. His findings supported the Olsons' suspicion that Frank Olson had likely been murdered.

Too far-fetched? Eric Olson cites a 1953 CIA manual. It notes, "The most efficient accident, in simple assassination, is a fall of 75 feet or more onto a hard surface."

But why would the CIA murder one of its own? Eric Olson argues that his father had deep moral misgivings about the research into biological warfare, including work with airborne pathogens that he had been doing for the agency. In fact, he had decided to quit his job. Eric is convinced that the CIA viewed his father as a security risk, one who had to be silenced.

The CIA has never responded to Starrs's findings.

BY 1998 Sid Gottlieb's commune was unraveling. Gottlieb, then 80, was too frail to work the land. He had designed a second dream home, with a tower for meditation, but it was never to be built. Reluctantly, he and Margaret purchased the home in Washington, Va. He sensed he did not have long.

Gottlieb had become more withdrawn. In college he had ribbed Stanley Mehr for quoting the Matthew Arnold poem "Dover Beach," dismissing it as pessimistic. But in his last years, Gottlieb recited it to Mehr, having committed the spectacularly dark final lines to memory:

*. . . for the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor
light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help from
pain;*

*And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle
and flight,*

Where ignorant armies clash by night.

Even as his health deteriorated, he faced additional lawsuits from the ghosts of his past. In 1952 Stanley Milton Glickman was an artist living in Paris. Years later, Glickman would remember an American with a clubfoot who had slipped LSD into his drink at a cafe, leaving him with recurrent hallucinations—in essence, driving him mad. In the early '80s, Glickman sued Gottlieb. When Glickman died in 1992, his sister continued the suit.

There was no evidence placing Gottlieb in Paris at the time, nor any other evidence linking him to Glickman. When Gottlieb died, the suit was brought against

his estate. In time, even the judge passed away. Finally, in 1999—two months after Gottlieb's death—the suit was dismissed. Gottlieb's estate prevailed.

"I just feel badly with what he had to put up with in the latter part of his life," recalls Mehr. "He gradually became depressed, and it's hard to say how much was due to his heart ailment and how much was due to the endless lawsuits. He was not the same man the last few years of his life."

When he died on March 6, 1999, secrecy descended once more. The Clore English Funeral Home in Culpeper declined to disclose details of final arrangements, not even the disposition of his ashes. The local paper, the Rappahannock News, observed his passing with one terse paragraph. The last line read, "Services will be private."

"It was the shortest obituary in history," remembers editor Barbara Wayland. The family had feared refueling old controversies. Nonetheless, old recriminations resurfaced almost immediately. Major newspapers through the United States and abroad dredged up the lurid details of Gottlieb's CIA past. His obituary in the Times of London began, "When Churchill spoke of a world 'made darker by the dark lights of perverted science' he was referring to the revolting experiments conducted on human beings by Nazi doctors in the concentration camps. But his remarks might with equal justice have been applied to the activities of the CIA's Sidney Gottlieb." The Guardian of London headlined its obituary "The Real Manchurian Candidate." The Toronto Sun's obituary ran under the headline "CIA Acid Guru Dies."

Such accounts found their way back to Rappahannock County. "People were tearing their hair out and beating their breasts saying he was evil personified, and how could they reconcile that with the man they knew?" recalls Lois Manookian, a close friend of Gottlieb's.

Many rallied to Gottlieb's defense. Bob Scott wrote a letter to the Rappahannock News. "The big city newspapers were not able to know the Sid Gottlieb we knew so well," Scott wrote. "Sid Gottlieb personified the spirit of the selfless servant." For others, it was more difficult coming to terms with the news. "What we read about him was not the man we knew," says Kathy Clements, who ran the hospice.

"It was hard for me to square that up with the person I knew," recalls the Rev.

Phillip Bailey. "It just kind of floored me that he would have been involved in anything that would have endangered people without them knowing it. He was a very gentle, caring person."

Says attorney Frank Reynolds, "If he did the things that he did—that they say he did—how do I put this? If he did the things he did, it requires an ability to put research above other things and it sure looked to me like he put human things above other things in the time I knew him."

Many have reached the same inexorable conclusion, the one articulated by Rose Ann Sharp, who worked in the preschool where Gottlieb volunteered: "I always thought that a lot of Sid's later life was spent atoning, whether he needed to or not, for how he had been exposed publicly as some sort of evil scientist."

"I felt that he was on a path of expiation, whether consciously or unconsciously," agrees Rabbi Carla Theodore. In part she came to that conclusion after the revelations of Gottlieb's CIA past, but there were earlier hints. Theodore remembers him commiserating with a friend who said she had a past that had to be kept hidden.

"I, too, have done things I really regret," Gottlieb told her. "But I am learning to keep it to myself." For a time, Gottlieb told Theodore, his own adult children were not speaking to him. "There were enough cries of horror from near and far," says Theodore. "It was an extremely big fact of his past. Somehow he was living around it. It was there like a pink elephant.

"I once asked him if I could talk to him about it, and he said, 'Yes, not many people asked.' But the thing was, his answers were so defended that I gave up after a few minutes. It was a barrier. I wasn't going to get the truth. He was a delightful person to interact with, but at the same time I feel he grieved and suffered and that that was always there. Maybe in retrospect he was as puzzled by what he had done as we were who heard about it."

Says Lois Manookian, "He had given his heart and soul to the CIA, and because he made some mistakes, he suddenly found himself to be a national demon."

But "he was always the same person," insists Manookian. "He did not become a different person 20 years ago. He was a man of great honor and great integrity."

What Manookian saw in Sid Gottlieb was a man of deep faith who sometimes put it in the wrong place. "He was not a

monster but a man," says Manookian, "He was, and is, us, and we didn't want to see it."

In the end, his life, like many, was riddled with contradictions. He rarely spoke of the CIA, and when he did, he sometimes uttered what would have been apostasy to a younger Sidney Gottlieb. Gottlieb friend Butch Zindel says that Gottlieb told him he had never really believed that communism was the threat it was made out to be. "We wasted a lot of money and a lot of people fighting it," he once said.

In 1993 Gottlieb declined an interview with U.S. News & World Report, saying only that he was "on the side of the angels now."

Gottlieb's two worlds came together for one brief afternoon in the gym of the old schoolhouse across from Gottlieb's home. There, perhaps 200 gathered for his memorial service, bearing casseroles

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and covered dishes. Most who spoke were neighbors and friends from his second life, but there were also white-haired men from Langley who did not speak publicly but mingled afterward. The arc of his life had stretched from one Washington to the other. The first had all but branded him a monster. The second all but canonized him.

"AH—POOR Sid Gottlieb," says Richard Helms, a former director of the CIA. "He has been heavily persecuted, but to bail him out of the troubles he's in would take a lot more than just a few minutes and I'm not sure I'd be much of a contributor to it. The nation just saw something they didn't like and blasted it, and he took the blame for it."

Now 88 and editing his own memoirs, Helms has chosen to delete all reference to MK-ULTRA. "I see no way to handle it in the amount of space I have available," he says.

Gottlieb's CIA associate John Gittinger

maintained his friendship with Gottlieb after retirement, but the two rarely spoke of their travails. Still, Gittinger believes Gottlieb suffered from the investigations and lawsuits. "His was twice as bad as mine, and mine was terrible," says Gittinger. "I have a feeling that Sid was left out on a limb as far as support from the agency was concerned."

Even now, Gottlieb has not fully escaped his past. Eric Olson, who lost his father 48 years ago, is preparing to sue the government, claiming that his earlier settlement was tainted by lies. His father's skeleton, potential evidence, rests under lock and key in the office of forensic pathologist James Starrs. Tissue samples are in labs in Florida and Pennsylvania.

But Gottlieb's life raised a question broader than any that will ever be addressed in court. It was the subtext of every obituary, the unspoken question on the lips of mourners: how to reconcile the two Sid Gottliebs. One is humble and compassionate, an altruist eager to ease the miseries of the weak and sick. The other, a heedless Cold Warrior, is willing to experiment on innocents or unleash anthrax in the name of national security.

It is hard to argue that Sid Gottlieb was not a product of his time. His life reflected the same polarities that defined the Cold War, the virtues and vices of extreme patriotism, the promise and perversion of science. He inhabited another era—a time of smothering conformity, loyalty oaths, witch hunts, segregation, lobotomies, sterilizations and radiation experiments.

As recently as August, many might have found it easy to look back at those excesses as virtually medieval and call them "unthinkable," a handy term to distance ourselves from unsavory elements of our own past. But what was unthinkable in summer is no longer so in autumn. This season, we don't need Gottlieb or anyone else to convince us of the hidden threats and potential horrors we face. We can see it in the endless loop of the news.

The revulsion felt at secret American schemes of assassination has given way to the fervent hope of some that our assassins will be more successful this time. A recent national poll revealed that one in three Americans is ready to sanction torture in the interrogation of terrorism suspects. Once again, the good we do and the evil we are capable of glide within the same tight orbit. 11